A

SERMON

Preach'd before the Univerſity

OF

OXFORD

At St. Peters Church in the Eaſt on *Mid-Lent* Sunday *March* 29. 1685.

BY

John Norris M. A. and Fellow of *All-Souls* College in OXFORD.

Seeſt thou a man wiſe in his own Conceit? There is more hopes of a Fool than of Him. Prov. 26. 12.

OXFORD,

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To the Reverend

Dr. *HENRY MORE* of *Christ's College* in CAMBRIDGE.

Reverend SIR,

NEither *the* Ambition *of honouring this Discourse with your* Great *Name, nor the* Vanity *of thinking this slender Oblation a sufficient discharge from those strong Obligations whereby I stand endebted to you, were the Motives which determin'd my Choice in this Dedication. I intend only hereby to expres my great* Veneration *for your* Worth, *and my* Gratitude *for that* Particular *share which you have been pleas'd to vouchsafe me in your* Favour.

As for the Discourse which now beggs your acceptance and protection, I am not unsensible that much of it lies out of the common road of thinking, and may upon that Score incur the Censure of those narrow-spirited Theorists, *who confine their Speculations to the limits of* Antiquity, *resign up the natural*

natural Prerogative *of their underſtandings to the Tyranny of dead Authors, and prefer Lead and Copper ſo it wear the* Stamp *of* Authority, *before the fineſt and nobleſt Metal that has not the* luck *to be a* Coin.

But Sir, I need not fear your diſapprobation on this account, whoſe active Soul has long ſince travers'd o're the whole Field *of* Truth, *and whoſe temper is ſo unprejudic'd and even-pois'd, as to receive the moſt Novel* Hypotheſis *(were it poſſible for any to be ſuch to you) without ſtarting and amuſement, and if true, to imbrace it, tho with the Cenſure of* Singularity.

And here Opportunity tempts me to run a long Deſcant *upon your great Worth and the* Variety *of your Intellectual Accompliſhments, but I conſider, that ſhould I with the* Athenian *Oratour imploy Ten years in a* Panegyric, *I could add nothing either to your* Fame *or to your* Satisfaction, *and beſides I fear I ſhall ſufficiently abuſe your* Patience *in the* following *Papers, and therefore I am the more concern'd to ſpare your* Modeſty *in* this.

But I forget how ſacred your hours are, and have perhaps already too much reaſon to beg your, and the Worlds, *pardon for diſturbing an excellent Meditation. For which offence a ſpeedy Concluſion*

ſion will be the beſt Apology. *I end therefore with this humble Requeſt, that whatever your judgement be of this Preſent as to other reſpects, you would not fail to* think *it a ſincere Teſtimony of that vaſt eſteem which you moſt deſervedly have in the heart of*

All-Souls *College* Mar. 31.

(SIR,)

Your moſt Obliged

and Humble Servant

JOHN NORRIS.

A

SERMON

Preached before the Univerſity of OXFORD, &c.

Rom. 12. Chap. v. 3.

——*Not to think of himſelf more highly than he ought to think; But to think ſoberly according as God hath dealt to every man the meaſure of Faith.*

THERE is nothing wherein men are ſo much *divided* from one another as in *Opinions*, and nothing wherein they unanimouſly *conſpire* than in *thinking well* of *themſelves*. This is a Humour of ſo *Catholic* a *Stamp*, and univerſal *Empire*, that it may ſeem

to challenge a place among those *Elements* of our Constitution, those *Essentials* of our nature which run throughout the *whole* Kind, and are participated by every *Individual*. For should a man *take the Wings of the Morning*, and and travel with the Sun round the Terrestrial Globe, he would hardly find a man either of a *Judgement* so difficult to be *pleas'd*, or of *accomplishment* so *little* to *recommend* him, that was not notwithstanding sufficiently in *love* with himself, however he might dislike every thing else about him; And without question that arrogant and peevish *Mathematician* who charged the grand *Architect* with want of skill in the *Mechanism* of the World, thought he had play'd the *Artist* well enough in *himself*, and as to the *Harmony* of his *own* frame acquitted the *Geometry* of his Maker.

And as men are thus naturally apt to think well of themselves in general, so there is nothing wherein they indulge this Humour more than in the Opinion they have of the *Goods* of the *Mind*, and among these there is none which has so great a share of their *Partiality*, as their *Intellectual* faculty. The *Desire* of Knowledge is not more natural then the *Conceit* that we are already furnish'd with a considerable Measure of it, and tho a particular *Sect* were Characteriz'd by that Appellation, yet all mankind are

in

in reality, *Gnoſtics*. For as 'tis (ingeniouſly obſerved by the excellent *Carteſius*) nothing is more equally diſtributed among men than the *Intellectual Talent*, wherewith every one fancies himſelf ſo abundantly ſtockt, that even thoſe who have the moſt *unſatiable* Deſires, and whom Providence could not ſatisfy in any one thing elſe, are notwithſtanding as to this *Diſpenſation* of Heaven well enough *content*, complain not of the dull Planet that influenc'd their Nativity, or wiſh their minds more *richly endow'd* than they are. And altho there are a *generation* of men who uſe to be very eloquent in ſetting out the degeneracy of humane nature in general, and particularly in decyphering the *Shortneſs* of our *Intellectual Sight*, and the defects of our now *diminiſh'd* underſtanding, yet ſhould a man take them at their word, and apply that *Verdict* to themſelves in particular which they ſo *freely* beſtow upon the whole Species, no men in the world ſo full of reſentment and impatience as they; and I dare affirm notwithſtanding their *Harangues* upon the Corruption of Human Nature, could all mankind lay a *true* claim to that *Eſtimate* which they paſs upon *themſelves*, there would be little or no difference betwixt *laps'd* and *perfect* Humanity, and God might again review his *image* with *paternal* Complacency, and ſtill *pronounce* it *good*.

Diſſert. de Method. p. 1.

Nor is it at all to be wonder'd that *Self-Conceitedneſs* ſhould be of ſuch an unlimited and *Tranſcendental* Nature as to run through all Sorts and *Claſſes* of men, ſince the cauſe of it, *Self-love*, has ſuch an univerſal *Juriſdiction* in our hearts. 'Tis moſt natural and neceſſary for every man (and indeed for every Intelligent Being) to be a Lover of himſelf, and to covet whatſoever any way tends to the perfection of his Nature. And as 'tis neceſſary for every man to be thus affected towards himſelf, ſo is this the only Diſpoſition of mind wherein Man acts with Conſtancy and *Uniformity*. Our other Paſſions have ſometimes their total intermiſſions, and at beſt their *increaſes* and *decreaſes*, but this is * allways at *Full*, and ſtands *drawn* out to the utmoſt *Stretch* of its Capacity. No man loves himſelf more at one time then at another, and that becauſe he allways loves himſelf in the higheſt Degree that is poſſible. *More* than all good he *cannot* wiſh to himſelf, and *leſs* than all he *will* not, nay I had allmoſt pronounc'd it impoſſible for Omnipotence it ſelf which *ſtays the proud waves* of the Ocean, and blocks up its violent efforts with *barrs and doors*, to ſay unto this Paſſion, *hitherto ſhalt thou come but no further*, or to ſet any other bounds to it beſides thoſe of all *poſſible* good.

* *See my Diſcourſe of Heroic Piety pag. 72 and 73.*

Jer. 38. 10.

Now

Now Man being ſuch an *infinite* Lover of himſelf, is eaſily brought to *believe* that he is really Maſter of many of thoſe excellencies and perfections, which he ſo paſſionately *wiſhes* among the *Inventory* of his poſſeſſions. For there is this notorious difference betwixt *Self-love* and the *Love* of *others*, that whereas the Love of others *ſuppoſes* an opinion of their excellency, the love of our ſelves *begets* it. We *love* others becauſe we *think well* of them, but (ſo prepoſterous is the method of Self-love) we think well of our ſelves becauſe we firſt love our ſelves. So that now upon the whole, conſidering how neceſſarily and vehemently every man is carried on to the love of himſelf, and what a natural product Self-conceit is of Self-love, 'tis much to be fear'd, that as we cannot ſet *any* bounds to the *love* of our ſelves, ſo we ſhall hardly ſet *due* ones to our *Opinions* of our ſelves, and conſequently the moſt mortify'd and reſign'd Man of us all, has no reaſon to think himſelf unconcern'd in this Admonition of the Apoſtle.---- *Not to think of himſelf more highly than he ought to think; but to think ſoberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the meaſure of Faith.*

'Tis ſuppoſed that the Apoſtle in theſe words had reſpect to the then prevailing Hereſy of *Gnoſtics*, a ſort of men that pretended to great

Heights

Heights, of divine Knowledge, to close intimacies and familiarities with God, and upon that presumption grew so haughty and insolent as to *despise dominions, and speak evil of dignities*, and withal so careless and secure, as to *defile the flesh*, and indulge themselves all manner of Sensuality, as you may see their Character in the Epistle of St. *Jude*. Nay of such turbulent ungovernable Principles and profligate manners were these men, that some of the Learned (and particularly an eminent Divine of our own Church) have adventured to write upon their Fore-heads, *Mystery*, and to place them in the *Chair* of *Anti-Christ*. As an Antidote therefore against this Poison, the Apostle who through the *Abundance of Revelation* had himself been in danger of being *exalted above Measure*, and experimentally knew how prone humane nature is to *swell* and *plume* upon a Conceit of its own excellencies, thought it expedient to advise his Charge at *Rome* (the place which *Simon Magus* the Author of that proud Sect had (as *Eusebius* tells us) made choice of to be the *Scene* of his Magical Operations) to moderate and sober thoughts of themselves, and being to teach them a Lesson of Humility, he modestly ushers it in with a Preface of his Commission and Authority. *For I say* (says he) *through the grace given unto me to every man that is among you not to think of himself more highly*, &c.

Dr. Hammond

2 Cor. 12. 7.

Hist. Eccles. lib. 2. c. 13.

The

The Diſcourſe which I deſign upon theſe words ſhall be comprized within theſe limits.

Firſt, I obſerve that we are not at our own liberty to entertain what Opinions we pleaſe concerning our ſelves, but that we ought to regulate them by ſome *Standard*. Which I collect from the former part of the Text, *Not to think of himſelf more highly than he ought to think, but to think ſoberly.*

Secondly, I obſerve that the *Standard* whereby we are to regulate our Opinions concerning our ſelves are thoſe excellencies and perfections which we are *really* indow'd with, which I collect from the latter part of the Text, *according as God has dealt to every man the meaſure of Faith.*

And in the third place I ſhall conſider the Abſurdities and ill Conſequences of tranſgreſſing this *Standard*, whereby it ſhall appear how highly reaſonable this *Admonition* of the Apoſtle is, and ſo conclude with a practical Application of the whole in relation to our ſelves, and the preſent occaſion.

I begin with the firſt Propoſition, *That we are not at our own liberty to entertain what Opinions we pleaſe concerning our ſelves, but that we ought*

ought to regulate them by ſome Standard.

The Acts of the *underſtanding* are by ſome men thought as free from all *Law* as the Acts of the *will* are from all *neceſſity*, and accordingly they give every one a *Toleration* to *abound in his own ſenſe* and (provided his *actions* be conformable to the Rule) to *think* what he pleaſe. Now ſince a Man cannot be accountable for an *Opinion* of *himſelf* in particular, unleſs it be firſt granted that he is under a Law as to the Acts of his *underſtanding* in general, before I can proceed any farther I find it neceſſary to lay down this *Preparatory* Poſition, That we are under an Obligation as to the Acts of our underſtanding, or (which is all one) that we are accountable for them. Nay I believe I may venture higher and affirm that the underſtanding is not only under Obligation but that 'tis the *Primary* and *immediate* Subject of of it. For the proof of which Paradox, I deſire the Patrons of the *Intellectual Libertiniſm* to conſider, that that muſt be the Primary and immediate ſubject of all *Obligation* which is ſo of *Liberty*. Now that this cannot be the *Will*, I ſuppoſe will be acknowledged a clear conſequence if the Will neceſſarily follows the Practical Dictate of the Underſtanding. And that it does ſo, I think there is *Demonſtration*.

'Tis

'Tis an unqueſtionable Axiom in all the Schools of Learning in the world, that the Object of the Will is *apparent* good; Now apparent good in other words, is that which is apprehended or judg'd to be good, and if ſo, then it follows that the Will cannot but conform to the Dictate of the Underſtanding, becauſe otherwiſe ſomething might be the object of the Will that is not apprehended good, which is contrary to the ſuppoſition. In ſhort, the Will (as *Aquinas* has well expreſſed it) is the *Concluſion* of an *Operative Syllogiſm*, and follows as neceſſarily from the *Dictate* of the Underſtanding as as any other Concluſion does from its Premiſes, and conſequently cannot be the *immediate* ſubject of Liberty, and conſequently not of Obligation.

But then are we not involv'd in the ſame difficulty as to the *underſtanding*? Does not that act with equal (if not more) neceſſity than the *Will?* So I know it is ordinarily taught. But if this be abſolutely and univerſally true, I muſt confeſs it above the reach of my Capacity to ſalve the Notion of Morality, or Religion, or to find out an expedient how the *Foundations* of the *Intellectual* world ſhould not be *out of courſe*. For ſince 'tis evident both from the preceding Demonſtration, and from experimental Reflection, that the Will neceſſa-

rily acts in Conformity to the Dictates of the Understanding, if those very Dictates are also wholely and altogether necessary, there can be no such thing as a τὸ ἐφ' ἡμῖν, the man is bound hand and foot, has nothing left whereby to render him a Moral Agent, to qualify him for Law or Obligation, Vertue or Vice, Reward or Punishment. But these are Absurdities not to be indured, and therefore I conclude according to the Rules of right Reasoning, the *Principle* from which they flow to be so too.

To clear up then the whole Difficulty with as much Brevity and Perspicuity as in a matter of this intricacy is possible, I shall no longer consider the Understanding and Will as Faculties really distinct either from the Soul it self, or from one another, but that the Soul does immediately understand and will by it self, without the intervention of any Faculty whatsoever. And that for this demonstrative reason in short, because in the contrary Hypothesis, either *Judgement* must be ascribed to the Will, and then the will immediately commences Understanding, or the Assent of the Will must be blind, brutish, and accountable, both which are as great Absurdities as they are true Consequences. This being premised, I grant that as the Soul necessarily Wills as she understands,

to

ſo likewiſe does ſhe neceſſarily underſtand as the Object appears. And thus far our ſight *terminates* in *Fatality*, and *Neceſſity* bounds our *Horizon*. That then that muſt give us a *Proſpect* beyond it, muſt be this, that altho the Soul neceſſarily underſtands or judges according to the Appearance of things, yet that things ſhould ſo *appear* (unleſs it be in Propoſitions that are ſelf-evident, as that the whole is greater than any one part, or the like) is not alike neceſſary, but depends upon the degrees of Advertency or Attention which the Soul uſes, and which to uſe either more or leſs is fully and immediately in her own power. And this indifferency of the Soul as to attending or not attending I take to be the only τὸ ἐφ' ἡμῖν, the bottom and foundation into which the Morality of every action muſt be at length reſolv'd. For a farther proof as well as Illuſtration of which Hypotheſis let us apply it to a particular caſe and try how well it will anſwer the *Phænomena*. In the caſe then of *Martyrdom*, I look upon ſin as an evil, and not only ſo but (while I attend fully to its Nature) the greateſt of evils. And as long as I continue this Judgement 'tis utterly impoſſible I ſhould commit it, there being according to my preſent apprehenſion no *greater* evil for the declining of which I ſhould think it eligible. But now the evil of *Pain* being preſented before

me, and I not ſufficiently attending to the evil of Sin, this latter appears to be the leſſer evil of the two, and I accordingly *pro hic & nunc* ſo pronounce it, and in Conformity to that judgement *neceſſarily* chuſe it. But becauſe 'twas abſolutely in my power to have *attended* more heedfully there was Liberty in the Principle, the miſtake which influenc'd the action was vincible, and conſequently the action it ſelf imputable. This *Hypotheſis* however ſtrange it may ſeem to thoſe that have ſworn Faith and Allegiance to the Dictates of the Schools, I believe will be the more approv'd the more it is examin'd, and that not only as rational and conſiſtent in it ſelf, but alſo as a refuge from thoſe Abſurdities which attend the ordinary Solutions. Neither is this account wholely *unlicens'd* by Authority, for I find ſome hints and intimations of it in the * *School* of *Plato*, where the reaſon why thoſe middle ſort of Beings call'd Heroes are not ſo uniformly pure as the Ἀγαθοδαίμονες or Νόες, is aſſign'd to be becauſe they do not ſo equally *attend* to the *Beauty* of the *Supream Good*.

* *See* Hierocles *upon the Golden Verſes of* Pythagoras.

From what has been ſaid it appears plainly that the Morality of every humane action muſt be at length reſolv'd into an immediate indifference that the Soul has of *attending* or not *attending*, and conſequently that we are not only under

under Obligation as to the acts of the Understanding, but that all Obligation *begins* there.

Having thus clear'd the way by the Proof of this Preparatory Position, that we are under Obligation as to the acts of the Understanding in general, I may now proceed to consider that our opinion of our selves is *one* of those acts of the Understanding which are subject to Law, or in other terms, that *we are not at our own liberty to entertain what Opinions we please concerning our selves, but that we ought to regulate them by some Standard.* Now the general reason of this is, because 'tis of great moment and influence in relation to our Practice, what Opinion we entertain concerning our selves. Indeed there are many acts of the Understanding which tho originally *free*, yet fall under no Obligation by reason of the *Indifferency* of the Matter, as in things of pure and naked Speculation. These are the *unforbidden* Trees of the Garden, and here we may let loose the Reins and indulge our thoughts the full Scope. Thus there is no danger of *Heresy* in asserting or denying the *Antipodes*, nor is *Orthodoxy* concern'd whether the *Moon* be *habitable.* But altho to mistake a Star be of no consequence to the *Theorist* that sits immured in his Study, yet it may be to the *Pilot* that is to *Steer* his *Course* by it. There are *other* things which have

have a *practical* Aſpect, and here 'tis not *indifferent* what we *think*, becauſe 'tis not *indifferent* what we *do*. Now among theſe the Opinion of our ſelves is to be reckon'd, as having a great influence upon our well or ill demeaning our ſelves reſpectively, as will more minutely and particularly appear when we come in the third and laſt place to conſider the abſurdities and ill conſequences of trangreſſing the *Standard* preſcribed, and therefore I ſhall defer the farther proſecution of it till then, and in the mean while proceed to the ſecond *Obſervable*, Namely,

That the Standard whereby we are to regulate our Opinions concerning our ſelves, are thoſe excellencies and perfections which we are really indow'd with. Which is collected from theſe words, *according as God has dealt to every man the meaſure of Faith.*

In the former part of the Text there was indeed a Reſtraint laid upon our Opinions concerning our ſelves, but it was general only and indefinite. But here the ground is meaſured out, and the Boundaries preciſely ſet. Μέτρον πίστεως, that's the great *Ecliptic Line* which is to bound the Career of our moſt forward and *Self-indulging* Opinions. If we keep within this compaſs our motion is natural and regu-

lar,

lar, but if we ſlide never ſo little out of it, 'tis unnatural and portentous. Or to ſpeak with greater Simplicity, he that judges of himſelf according to thoſe excellencies, whether Moral or Intellectual, which he really has, does φρονεῖν εἰς τὸ σωφρονεῖν, *thinks ſoberly*, and he that thinks himſelf indow'd with any *Kind* or *Degree* of Excellence which really he has not, does ὑπερφρονεῖν παρ' ὃ δεῖ φρονεῖν, *thinks of himſelf more highly than he ought to think.*

Here then are Two things to be conſidered.

Firſt that we may proceed ſo *far* as this *Standard.*

And Secondly, That we may not go *beyond* it.

Firſt, That we may proceed ſo far.

It has been taught by ſome of the ſevere Maſters of *Spiritual Mortification*, That we ought to take up the moſt low and abject thoughts of our ſelves that are poſſible, to be conſcious of no manner of excellency in our ſelves, and conſequently not to be affected with the leaſt *Self-complacency*; That we ought to account our ſelves to be Nothing, to have nothing, to be worth nothing, but to be very

refuſe

1 Cor. 4. 13. *refuſe and off-ſcouring of all things.* And this they call the *Myſtical Death*, or the *Spiritual Annihilation.* Now whatever degrees of *excellency* this may have (which I ſhall not now diſpute) 'tis moſt certain it can have nothing of *Duty.* For tho it may, and oftentimes is required of a man to think the *Truth*, yet he can never be under an Obligation to be *miſtaken.* Beſides, 'Tis hard to conceive how any man (eſpecially one that *dwels* much with himſelf, and heedfully reflects upon the actings of his own mind) ſhould be maſter of any conſiderable excellency, and yet not be conſcious of it. And beſides, That very degree of Attention which is required that a man ſhould not think himſelf *more* accompliſh'd than indeed he is, will alſo infallibly hinder him from thinking he is *leſs.* 'Tis true indeed *Moſes* knew not that his Face ſhone, after he had been converſing with God on the Mount. He ſaw not the Orb of glory that ſtream'd from him, and wondred what it was that made him ſo dreadful to the people. But 'tis not ſo with the Soul, whoſe reflexive faculty will not fail to give her information of her moſt retir'd and reſerv'd accompliſhments. 'Tis not with the *Leſſer*, as with the *Greater* World, where whole Tracts and Regions (and thoſe ſome of the beſt too) ly undiſcover'd. No,

man

Man cannot be ſuch a *Stranger* to his own Perfections, ſuch an *America* to himſelf. For *who can know the things of a man, if not the Spirit of man which is in him.* And accordingly we find that the *Ignorance* of our ſelves with which Mankind has been hitherto ſo univerſally tax'd, runs quite in another Chanel, and does not conſiſt in *overlooking* any of thoſe indowments which we *have*, but in *aſſuming* to our ſelves thoſe which we *have not.*

I confeſs (were it poſſible) I ſhould think it adviſeable for ſome perſons to be ignorant of ſome of their excellencies, and like the Sun not to *reflect* home to their own *Sphere* of *light*; Not that I think in the leaſt *unlawful* to be fully conſcious of ones own worth, but only I conſider that ſome men have not heads ſtrong enough to *indure* Heights, and walk upon *Spires* and *Pinnacles.* But if they can ſtand there without growing *vertiginous*, they need not queſtion the lawfulneſs of the *ſtation*, they are ſtill within the *Region* of *Humility.* For 'tis not every thinking well of ones ſelf that falls in with the notion of *Pride*, but only when there is more of *Opinion* than there is of *Worth.* 'Twas this that was the Condemnation of the Apoſtate Angel, not that he took a juſt complacency in the eminency of his Station, but that he vainly arrogated to himſelf what was not his *due*, in that he ſaid, *I*

will aſcend into Heaven, I will exalt my throne
Iſai. 14. 13. *above the Stars of God, I will ſit upon the ſides of the North, I will aſcend above the heights of the Clouds, I will be like the moſt High.* 'Twas for this that the Angel of *Death* drew upon *Herod*, not becauſe he was pleas'd with the *fineneſs* and *ſucceſs* of his Oratory, but becauſe he was not ſo *juſt* to *God* as the People were to *him*, but lookt upon himſelf as the *Head-fountain* of his own perfections, and ſo *gave*
Acts 12. 23. *not God* the *glory.*

But now if we take care to proportion our eſtimation *of*, and our Complacencies *in* our ſelves to the meaſure of our endowments, and if we look upon thoſe very endowments not as *originary* and independent but as *derivative* from the *Father* of
James 1. 17. *lights from whom every good and perfect gift deſcends*, and accordingly refer all to Gods glory and with the Elders in the Revelations take off our
Rev. 4. 10 Crowns from our Heads and caſt them at the foot of the Throne, we have not only the expreſs words of the Text, but likewiſe all the reaſon in the world to warrant the *Sobriety* of our Opinions. For, this is but to have a right and exact underſtanding of ones ſelf. And why may not a man be allow'd to take a true Eſtimate of himſelf as well as of another man? Or why ſhould a man think an excellency leſs valuable becauſe 'tis in himſelf? The Happineſs

of

of God consists in seeing himself *as he is*; he reflects upon the *Beauty* of his Essence, and rejoyces with an infinite *Complacency*. Now certainly that wherein consists the *Happiness* of the *Creator*, cannot be a *Sin* in the *Creature*. Besides, I would fain know why a man may not as lawfully think well of himself upon the Score of his real worth, as *desire* that *others* should think well of him for the same reason? And that he may do the latter is confess'd as well by the *Practice*, as by the common *Suffrage* of Mankind. For otherwise what becomes of that *good Reputation* which *Solomon* says *is rather to be chosen than great Riches*, and of which the Best and Wisest men of all ages had ever such a tender, such a passionate Regard? Nay 'tis look't upon as a very *Commendable* thing to be so affected, and the contrary is censured as the mark of a dissolute and *unmoraliz'd* temper. Only there is a Μέτρον τῆς Καυχήσεως to be observ'd in this as well as in the former, and as we are not to *stretch out our selves beyond our measure*, so must we take care with the great Apostle, not to give *others* occasion to *think of us above that which they see us to be*. Besides, if we may not be allow'd to *take the* full *Height* of our own Excellencies, how shall we be able to give God thanks for them? The *Elders* must know they *wear Crowns* before they can use them as Instruments of Adoration, and *Herod*

Prov. 22. 1

2 Cor. 10. 13.

2 Cor. 10. 14.

2 Cor. 12. 6.

must be conscious of the right *Genius* of his Oratory, before he *can give God the Glory*. Again in the last place, if a man may not have leave to take Cognisance of his own Deserts and to value himself accordingly, what will become of that συνειδησις αγαθης ἐπερώτημα εἰς Θεὸν Which the Apostle speaks of, *the answer of a good Conscience towards God*, which is nothing else but a Sentence of Approbation, which a man passes upon himself for the well managing of that *Talent* of Liberty which God has entrusted him with? Now this is the *Reward* of Vertue, and therefore certainly not *contrary* to it.

1 Pet. 3. 21.

Neither is this *Self-esteem* only the *Reward* of Vertue but also the *Cause* of it too, and consequently 'tis not only *allowable*, but also highly *needful* that we should think *Honorably* of our selves. 'Tis a frequent Observation among *Moral* and *Divine* Writers, That most if not all the Sins which men commit, proceed from want of a due sense of the Dignity of their Nature. And consequently a due reflection upon a man's own Worth, must needs be a strong *Preservative* against whatsoever would *stain* its *Glory*. *Shall such a man as I flee?* Was the powerful consideration that *buoy'd* up the *sinking* Spirits of *Nehemiah*. And 'tis one of the *Capital* Precepts of *Pythagoras*'s Morals (and perhaps one

Neh. 6. 11.

of

of the beſt too that was ever given to the World) -----Πάντων δ μάλιστα αἰδέσθητι σαυτόν. *Above all things reverence thy ſelf.* And 'twas the Saying of another of the Sons of Wiſdom, *Let not the Reverence of any man cauſe thee to ſin.* Which it certainly will do, unleſs we obſerve the former Rule, and reflect with due *Reverence* upon our own Worth and Dignity.

From theſe conſiderations (not to urge any more) it ſeems to me very evident, that 'tis not only *lawful* but in ſome reſpects highly *Expedient*, that our Opinions of our ſelves ſhould riſe up ſo as to be of a *Level* with our Excellencies, whatſoever they are. Let one of the Scales be mounted never ſo *high*, yet if there be a proportionable *Weight* in the *Other*, the Ballance moves regularly, and as it ſhould do. We may then proceed ſo *far* as this *Standard*.

But Secondly, We muſt not go *beyond* it. For all beyond this is *Pride*. Pride, that turn'd the Angels out of Heaven, *Adam* out of Paradice, and levell'd the great King of *Babylon* with the *Beaſts that periſh*; and which is nothing Dan. 4. 33.
elſe but an *Intemperate* Opinion of our ſelves, which conſiſts either in aſſuming to our ſelves any Excellency which we have not, or in *Overrating* what we have. Tho indeed in *Strict-*

neſs,

neſs of Notion this latter falls in with the former, For to *Over-rate* what we have, is indeed to aſſume ſome *Degree* of good which we have not. Here then begins our Reſtraint, the *Reaſonableneſs* of which will appear from the Abſurdities and ill Conſequences which attend the tranſgreſſing of this *Standard*, and which in the third and laſt place I come now to conſider.

I ſhall obſerve only the moſt notorious; and theſe I ſhall reduce to theſe Three general Heads.

Firſt, That it unqualifies us for the performance of many Duties.

Secondly, That it betrayes us into many ſins.

And Thirdly, That it fruſtrates all methods of Reformation. Of theſe very briefly.

Firſt an exceſſive opinion of our ſelves (and that is ſo which ſurpaſſes the meaſure of our real worth) unqualifies us for the performance of many Duties; and that both in relation to God, our Neighbour and our Selves.

Firſt in relation to God.

As

As *Folly* leads to *Atheiſm*, ſo does an *overweening* opinion of our own *Wiſdom* or any other excellency to *Profaneneſs*. For as *the Fool has ſaid in his heart there is no God*, ſo it is ſaid in another place That the *ungodly is ſo Proud that he careth not for him.* Pride then is altogether inconſiſtent with that Subjection, Honour and Veneration which we owe to God. For how can he ſubmit his paſſions to the *Authority* of the *Divine Will* who has made a *Law* of his *own*? And as it indiſpoſes us for all *active*, ſo likewiſe for all *paſſive* Obedience; for how can he *ſuffer* that with *Patience*, which he thinks he does not *deſerve* in *Juſtice*? Or how can he ſubmit with *reſignation* to the ſeeming unevenneſſes of Providential Diſpenſations, the equality of which becauſe he cannot *diſcern*, he muſt in *honour* to his own underſtanding *deny*? And upon the ſame ground it unqualifies us for *Faith* in many of the Divine Revelations. For how can he *Captivate* his underſtanding to *Myſteries*, who thinks it a diſhonour to *own* any, and is reſolv'd to *believe* no farther than he can *comprehend*? Pſal. 10. 4.

Laſtly, It unqualfies us for *Gratitude* towards God, and conſequently puts a Bar to all thoſe good actions which we would otherwiſe perform upon that *Principle*. And by this it becomes a *Multiplied*, a *Legion* evil. For how can he

he acknowledge an Obligation paſs'd upon him by Gods *Favours*, who calls them not by that name, but eſteems them as *Rewards* and *Payments*, and inverting the Proteſtation of the
Gen. 22. 10. good *Patriarch*, thinks himſelf *worthy* of the *greateſt* of his *mercies*.

Then Secondly, In relation to our Neighbour, it unqualifies us for Obedience to Civil Government. For how can he ſubmit to the Wiſdom of his Superiours, and pay an *implicite* deference to the *Occult* reaſons of State, who thinks himſelf wiſer than a whole *Senate*, and diſputes even the ways of *Providence*? Pride was ever obſerved to be the Mother of Faction and Rebellion, and accordingly St. *Jude* makes it part of the *Character* of the Proud *Gnoſtics*, *To deſpiſe Dominions and ſpeak evil of Dignities*.

Again, It unqualifies us for thoſe acts of Juſtice which conſiſt in a due obſervation of our Neighbours Merits, and a deference of external Reſpect proportionable to that obſervation. For how can he be at *leaſure* to take notice of *anothers* worth, who is ſo wholely taken up in the *contemplation* of his *own*? Let the Reputation of his beſt Friends (if it be poſſible for a Proud man to have any) be in never ſo great danger, he like *Archimedes*, is ſo over-buſie

buſie in admiring the Creatures of his own brain, thoſe *Draughts* and *Ideas* which he has form'd of *himſelf* there, that he regards not the *Ruin* that is about him. Or if he does, he is ſo far from appearing in their defence (as in Juſtice he ought) that he rather rejoyces at their *Spots* as *Acceſſions* to his own *brightneſs*.

Again, It unqualifies us for the Offices of Humanity, and Civil Behaviour, and all kinds of *Homilitical* virtue: for how can he treat thoſe with any tolerable Civility, whom he looks down upon as a whole *Species* below him?

Laſtly, it unqualifies us for Gratitude toward our Benefactors. For how can he think himſelf obliged by *man*, who counts *God* his *Debtor*?

Then Thirdly, In relation to our Selves, here is this grand ill conſequence of an immoderate ſalf-eſteem, that it unqualifies us not only for higher attainments, but even for the very *endeavours* of improvement, and ſo cuts ſhort and *bedwarfs* all our excellencies. 'Tis the Obſervation of *Cicero*, *Multi ad ſcientiam perveniſſent niſi ſe jam perveniſſe credidiſſent*, The *Opinion* of the Proud man has ſo far got the *ſtart* of the real *worth*, that the *latter* will never *overtake* the *former*.

And as the immoderate eſteem of our Selves

unqualifies us for the performance of many Duties, ſo does it alſo in the Second place Betray us into many Sins.

Firſt, Into all thoſe ſins which are contrary to the foremention'd Vertues reſpectively. And beſides them into many more, ſuch as are preſumption and ſecurity, vexation and diſcontent, contempt of others (tho at the ſame time it expoſes us to theirs) Anger and Contention, Malice and Revenge. For the Proud man is not content to be his own *private* Admirer, but quarels with all others that are not of his perſwaſi n, and with the *Tyrant* of *Babylon* kindles a *fire* for thoſe who will not *fall down and worſhip the Image which he has ſet up.*

Neither does the *Leproſy* ſtop here. But as it betrays us into many ſins, ſo in the Third and laſt place (which is the moſt diſmal Conſequence of all) It fruſtrates all Methods of Reformation. Gods judgements will but exaſperate and inrage him, becauſe he thinks he does *not* deſerve them, and his Mercies will not indear him, becauſe he thinks he *does*. *Advice* he thinks he does not *need*, and *Reproof* he cannot *bear*. Beſides he thinks ſo well of himſelf already, that he wonders what you *mean* by adviſing him to become *better*, and therefore as he does not endeavour after any of thoſe excellen-

cellencies which he thinks he has, ſo neither can he dream of mending thoſe faults which he thinks he is not guilty of: Thus is the man *Seal'd* up to iniquity, and deeply *lodg'd* in the *ſtrong holds* of ſin, where nothing that has a Salutary Influence can come nigh him. And in this he reſembles the firſt *Preſidents* of his Folly, who from Angels transform'd themſelves into Devils, and fell beyond the *poſſibilities* of *recovery*.

Theſe are ſome of the fruits of this *Root of Bitterneſs*, and tho more might be named, yet theſe I think ſufficient to juſtify this Admonition of the *Apoſtle* to every man, *not to think of himſelf more highly than he ought to think, but to think ſoberly, according as God has dealt to every man the meaſure of faith.* Let us then all endeavour to conform our opinions concerning our ſelves to this *Standard*. Let us not ſtretch our ſelves beyond our *natural dimenſions*, but learn to entertain modeſt and ſober thoughts of our own excellencies and indowments, and mortify our *underſtands* as well as our *ſenſitive affections*. And thus ſhall we *compleat* our *Lent* Exerciſe by joyning the mortification of the *Spirit* to that of the *fleſh*, without which the greateſt Auſterities wherewith we can afflict the *latter*, will not be *ſuch a Faſt as God has choſen*. For what will it avail to macerate the Body, while the principal part the Soul remains unmortify'd? The *Humility* of Moſes muſt conſpire with his Forty days *Faſting* to qualify a man for Divine Intercourſes,

to make him the Joy of Angels, the *Friend of God*. Thus then let us accompliſh the *Refinings* of our Souls, and fill up the *Meaſure* of our Mortifications. To which end let us add this one further Conſideration to what has been already ſaid, that Humility in the Judgement even of the *High and Lofty one that's inhabits Eternity*, is a Vertue of ſuch great Excellency, and ſingular advantage to the happineſs of Mankind, that our Bleſſed Saviour came down from Heaven to teach it, that his whole life was one continu'd Exerciſe of it, and that he has dignify'd it with the *firſt* place among his *Beatitudes*. Let us then as many as profeſs the Religion of the Humble and Crucify'd JESUS make it our ſtrict Care that we neglect not this his *great* Commandment, nor omit to Copy out this Principal Line, this main-ſtroke of the Pattern he has ſet us. Eſpecially let us of this place who are ſet among the *greater Lights* of the Firmament, and whoſe profeſſion and buſineſs is to contemplate *Truth* and to think of things as God made them in *Number*, *Weight* and *Meaſure*, labour in the *firſt* place to take juſt and true Meaſures of our *Selves*, that our *Knowledge puff us* not *up*, nor our *Height* become our *Ruin*.

Now to the only Wiſe God, Father, Son and Holy Ghoſt be all Adoration and Thanksgiving now and for ever. Amen.

The END.